

Project Cropsustain considerably strengthened research capacities at the Kmetijski inštitut Slovenije (KIS, Agricultural Institute of Slovenia). Tools and strategies were implemented for the development of sustainable approaches in agriculture, food production and security, and endeavour evaluations of climate change related effects on agro-ecosystems. Key areas were infrastructural improvements, creation of new jobs in research and management, national and international build up of collaboration, networking for improving the integration of KIS into the European Research Area, and promotional activities to increase the visibility of KIS as an excellence centre for sustainable agriculture. Defined scientific targets of the project addressed sustainable crop production and environmentally friendly plant protection strategies with a focus on (i) reference collections for quarantine and other severe plant pests and pathogens and their diagnostics, (ii) interactions between host plants, vectors, pests and pathogens requiring implementation of new methods, (iii) environmentally sound plant protection technologies, (iv) omics related research and bioinformatics, and (v) honeybees and their protection.

Six partner institutions supported KIS in the project, namely the Department of Agroecology, Aarhus University (Denmark); Leibniz-Institut DSMZ, German Collection of Microorganisms and cell cultures and Julius Kühn-Institut (Germany), EMBL-European Bioinformatics Institute and The James Hutton Institute (UK); and National Institute of Agricultural Research, INRA (France). The collaboration with these institutions included, among others, the realization of more than 90 exchange missions of scientists and managers for establishing research projects and networking and exchanging project related knowledge. The project allowed employment of four scientists that will strengthen research on insect pests, plant breeding, horticulture, and bioinformatics at KIS and two managers for the newly installed technological transfer and project office. Created positions will be retained at KIS also in the future. KIS significantly modernized its research facilities through purchasing and installing thirteen new instruments, which became intensively implemented into KIS research activities. Twenty-six events including scientific courses, round table discussions, workshops, conferences, etc. were organized. Leading European scientists, regional experts and politicians were recruited and actively participated in these events. The events also allowed the build up of networking with other European institutes including institutions from other Balkan countries allowing the creation of consortia for the participation in H2020 project calls. Cropsustain significantly changed general attitudes of KIS and led to policy adaptations that emphasize the urgent need for the development of sustainable principles. Networking links with the regional business sectors, agro-industries and farmer and stakeholder organizations were significantly improved specifically through management activities of the technological transfer office.

Project Cropsustain significantly increased the visibility of KIS that is now recognised nationally and internationally as a competence centre for sustainable agriculture and food production. The increased competence was acknowledged by the Slovenian government allowing the appointment of five additional young scientists for the implementation of national integrated pest management action plans. Results emerging from project Cropsustain will have a long term effect on KIS and the regional and international agriculture sector.